DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 196 601 RC 012 416

AUTHOR Fernandez, Celestino
TITLE Cultural Plurality in Higher Education: A Conflict Approach.
SPONS AGENCY San Francisco Univ., Calif. Dept. of Education.
PUB DATE Feb 77
NOTE 23p.: Paper presented at the National Policy Conference on Bilingualism in Higher Education (San Francisco, CA, February 1977).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Pluralism; *Culture Conflict; *Equal Education; Group Dynamics; *Higher Education; Mexican Americans; *Minority Groups; Models; Multicultural Education; *Power Structure; Social Structure; Sociocultural Patterns
IDENTIFIERS Linguistic Pluralism

ABSTRACT

A general theoretical framework, group conflict analysis, can be applied to the study of cultural plurality in higher education. Basically, the conflict perspective views society as a conglomerate of interest groups competing for dominance in and of society. Once a group gains dominance it will monopolize resources in an attempt to maintain and perpetuate its ruling status. The institutions of society become part of the resources controlled by the dominant group. In modern corporate societies education is a major institution and resource for the ruling group. Higher education (particularly schools of education) is a key institution because it creates and perpetuates ideologies which govern the formal compulsory education of all individuals. Institutions of higher education mirror the stratified ordering of the larger society. Culturally pluralistic programs in higher education are subject to the same second-class (or lower-status) citizenship as their respective ethnic groups in the larger society. Higher education tends to follow a unicultural monolingual ideology which favors one group over all others. A truly democratic society may diminish group conflicts through its policies by assuring equal opportunity to all members, regardless of cultural group membership. (Author/AN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED196601

CULTURAL PLURALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

A CONFLICT APPROACH*

Celestino Fernández

University of Arizona

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Celestino Fernández

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

RC 012416

*This paper was originally prepared for presentation at the National Policy Conference on Bilingualism in Higher Education in San Francisco, February 1977. The research reported herein was primarily supported by the Center for the Study of Culture in Education at the University of San Francisco. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position, policy, or endorsement of the funding agency.

Cultural Plurality in Higher Education:
A Conflict Approach

Abstract

This paper presents a general theoretical framework (conflict analysis) applicable to the study of cultural plurality in higher education. Basically, the conflict perspective views society as a conglomerate of interest groups competing for dominance in and of society. Once a group gains dominance it will monopolize resources in an attempt to maintain and perpetuate its ruling status. The institutions of society become part of the resources controlled by the dominant group. In mondern corporate societies education is a major institution and resource for the ruling group. Higher education, and in particular schools of education, is a key and forceful institution because it creates, maintains, and perpetuates ideologies which govern the formal compulsory education of all individuals.

Given our working theoretical model, one would expect institutions of higher education to mirror the stratified ordering of the larger society. Indeed, this is what was found. Culturally pluralistic programs in higher education are subject to the same second-class (lower-status) citizenship as their respective ethnic groups in the larger society. Higher education has tended to follow a unicultural monolingual ideology which favors one group over all others.

Finally, a truly democratic society may diminish group conflicts through its policies by assuring equal opportunity to all members, regardless of cultural group membership. In this light, four policy recommendations are proposed.

A sociological analysis of the institutions of any society, and in particular of the educational system, must begin with an analysis and discussion of the larger society. For institutions and organizations operate within, and mirror the structure of the larger society. That is, reflection upon the organizational structure of the greater system will provide the setting and clues necessary for understanding and explaining structural features of the educational system.

In this paper I present a working theoretical framework for viewing, understanding, and explaining the structure of society, and more specifically that of the educational system. A model, powerful enough to provide an explanation of the dynamics of education in corporate America, is called for. Group conflict theory provides such a model.[1] This framework is a basis for understanding the structure of education in general, and issues of cultural plurality and bilingualism in higher education in particular.

I urge you to consider these issues in light of the theoretical model outlined below. I engage in this exercise and ask you to participate, not for the mere sake of intellectual activity, but in order to arrive at practical results. For only in light of understanding the social structure of the educational system, its social foundations, and how it fits in the larger structure of society, will we be assured that the policy recommendations we suggest, if carried out, will produce the intended results.

The General Model

Group conflict theory of stratification revolves around two basic propositions, the first can be termed the "group" aspect and the second, the "conflict" aspect. The first assumption can be simply stated as:

society is composed of numerous associational groups sharing common cultures (or subcultures). The number of status groups varies from society to society and there is no need to determine a priori the exact number of these groups in a particular society. These are matters of empirical variations, not of definition, and therefore are interesting but not crucial to our proposition. What is important is that society is composed of groups, the number is irrelevant at this point.

The core of these status groups is families and friends, but they extend to larger communities, such as religious, ethnic, or socioeconomic classes. In general, the associational groups

> . . . comprise all persons who share a sense of status equality based on participation in a common culture: styles of language, tastes in clothing and decor, manners and other ritual observances, conversational topics and styles, opinions and values, and preferences in sports, arts, and media (Collins, 1971: 1009).

Status groups may assemble from a number of sources. They may form on the bases of social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, language, or any other shared interest or vested status. Weber (1968) outlines three common sources of group formation: 1) differences in life style based on economic situation; 2) differences in life style based on power position; and 3) differences in life style deriving from cultural or institutional differences.

Persons can be members of more than one status group. For example, the same person may be a member of a political group, a religious group,

a group based on ethnicity, and another based on language. Yet, it is seldom the case that the groups to which one person belongs are in direct opposition to each other. This point will be clarified when the second proposition is discussed below.

Figure 1 illustrates the associational status structure of the group conflict model of society. The larger circle represents the total society and the smaller circles within represent the diverse status groups.

(Figure 1 about here)

As Fernández and Llanes (1977) have noted, this illustration exemplifies the fluid and overlapping nature of associational groups and their status cultures in the larger society. Thus, groups vary in size, overlap in interests, and have fluid rather than rigid boundaries. In the United States we find numerous empirical examples illustrating these properties: 1) most groups in this nation share the same political and economic interests (overlap of interests); 2) not all ethnic groups are equal in numbers (vary in size); and 3) fine distinctions between religious sects are often unclear (fluid boundaries). Groups formed on the basis of culture and language also vary in their interests, although, as we will discuss later, there is a forceful tendency towards a monolingual-unicultural society.

Just as the numerous status groups have different interests based on some common characteristic, they have different levels of resources available based on their relative standing in the power structure. Consequently, some groups are in a better position to actively pursue their interests than other groups.

This differential distribution of resources implies the second proposition of our model, the "conflict" aspect: there is a continual struggle

among the status groups in society for various resources -- among these are power, wealth, and prestige. This proposition may also be stated as follows: structurally generated interest groups engage in conflicts over existing arrangements of social structure.

Given the competitive nature of this model of society, the implication is that one group emerges as dominant and takes over the control of the societal system. Once a group is dominant, it restructures society through its control of the resources, so as to maintain its power and dominant status. This restructuring is most easily represented as a system of stratification, as illustrated in Figure 2.

(Figure 2 about here)

The dominant group does not rule by itself, but rather through a system of differential distribution of power and authority. There are several sub-dominant groups who, while not exercising complete control over their life, do enjoy the benefits of society by agreeing to the dominant-status of the ruling cultural group and acting in partnership with the dominant group to bring about control of the societal system (Fernández and Llanes, 1977).

In modern society institutions and organizations become part of the resources controlled by the dominant group. The ruling group uses them to protect and perpetuate its dominant status (Collins, 1975; Fernández and Llanes, 1977).

> The struggle for wealth, power, and prestige is carried out primarily through organizations. There have been struggles throughout history among organizations controlled by different status groups, for military conquest, business

> advantage, or cultural hegemony . . . In the more complex societies, struggle between status groups is carried out in large part within organizations, as the status groups controlling an organization coerce, hire, or culturally manipulate others to carry out their wishes (Collins, 1971: 1009-1010).

"The establishment" selects new members and key assistants to high-status organizational positions from its own group. An effort is also made to recruit persons for lower-level positions who have been indoctrinated to respect and support the "superiority" of the dominant group. These lower-level recruits become "the administrators of the establishment." This practice assures the ruling group its dominant position, as well as a smooth transition of power from generation to generation.

In summary of this section, what I have outlined above is an approach to the study of society in which society is viewed as a conglomerate of interest groups competing for dominance in and of society, where one group evolves as dominant. Once a group becomes dominant the ordering of society is based on dominance and subordination. This social order does not evolve naturally because one group is better fitted to rule and others to be ruled, but rather, it is caused in specific ways. It is based on the differential distribution of power and authority. "Coherence and order in society are founded on force and constraint" (Dahrendorf, 1959:157). In short, social order is based on organized coercion, where the dominant group controls the major organizations, institutions, and other resources and constantly attempts to maintain this control.

> The elite [ruling group] cannot be truly thought of as men who are merely doing their duty. They are the ones who determine their duty, as well as the duties of those beneath them. They are not merely following orders: they give the orders. They are not merely "bureaucrats:" they command bureaucracies (Mills, 1956:286).

The dominant cultural community attempts to monopolize desirable organizational positions and other resources in an effort to perpetuate itself and its ruling status. The major institutions of society become part of the resources controlled by the dominant group. In modern corporate society, and in the United States in particular, the educational system serves as a key institution and resource for the dominant cultural group.

The Model Applied to Education

Viewed in this light, the primary social function of the educational system is to serve the dominant group. In modern America schools perform this function in two important ways. One, as a social process schools teach (transmit) a certain culture, and two, as a social institution they serve as credentialling and licensing institutions for allocation into the occupational structure.

In further explanation of these two points:

1. Schools are created to transmit particular cultures. Within all societies education serves as a vehicle for the socialization of the young. The cultural perceptions individuals hold are in large part the result of their schooling. The main activity of schools is the teaching of the dominant group's culture, both inside and

outside the classroom. Not only do the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the dominant community rule the educational system, but it is precisely the values, attitudes, and beliefs of this group which schools implant in their clients. Schools teach a particular language, styles of dress, values, attitudes, manners, aesthetic tastes, modes of interaction, in short, a particular culture. The total educational environment is geared to this end.

> Education socializes people into a particular kind of culture, working best on those who already have acquired the general orientation in their families (Collins, 1975:86-87).

In the United States the content of public school education has been dominated by Middle-Class, White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (WASP) culture (Becker, 1961; Dreeben, 1968; Fernández and Llanes, 1977; Fishman, 1961; Gordon, 1964; Hess and Torney, 1967; Ramírez and Castañeda, 1974; Waller, 1932).[2] The competitive nature of schools, the selective presentation of history, the training of doctors, lawyers, and other professionals, all reflect the cultural biases of this group. Furthermore, the English language has been taught as the national language and usage of other languages has been continually sanctioned (Gordon, 1964; Ramírez and Castañeda, 1974; U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1972).

2. A major purpose of the educational system in modern corporate society is to transmit and assign social status. This is most commonly accomplished by means of certification and formal licensing. Education has come to be the yardstick by which every

individual's "productive capabilities" are judged. Societal roles and positions are assigned based on the level (and to a lesser extent the quality) of education received.[3] In this way, even persons who do not go through the formal educational system are affected by it (Illich, 1970; Meyer, 1970). Educational requirements for participation in the larger society serve both to select members of the dominant culture to top-level positions, as well as to recruit individuals to middle-level positions who have acquired a general respect and reverence for the culture of the dominant group. Hence, this type of educational system can be viewed as serving as a legitimating institution for inequalities in the larger society. Numerous sources testify, with empirical evidence, that education has been used as a means of cultural selection (Collins, 1971; Gordon and Howell, 1959; Hollingshead, 1949). Based on his review of the literature in this area, Collins (1975) concluded that

> . . . education is important, not for providing technical skill but for membership in a cultural group which controls access to particular jobs (Collins, 1975: 454).

In short, educational requirements for "productive participation" in society have become the primary means of cultural control.

Cultural Plurality and Education

If the analysis of education is accurate up to this point, that is if one cultural group dominates the educational system, then we must conclude that the educational system in the United States, up until very recently, has been intentionally structured to include only one culture

and one language, and at the same time to exclude competing cultures and languages. This bias toward middle-class, WASP culture and towards the use of the English language is most visible in primary and secondary schools. This subject has been an area of much discussion and research in recent years (e.g., Mercer, 1973; Ramírez and Castañeda; Rist, 1970).

We suggest that the same cultural and class bias can be found in colleges and universities. Furthermore, it may be argued that institutions of higher education, and particularly schools of education, are in some respects more important areas for study since they play a special role in the preparation of curriculum, teachers, administrators and counselors for elementary and secondary schools. These institutions in large part (not in totality since they operate within the larger structure of society) define a realm of knowledge as appropriate for elementary and secondary school teachers to instill in their students. More importantly, and in more subtle ways, they defined the appropriate values, attitudes, teaching styles, in short, the appropriate culture and the corresponding cultural patterns for teachers to implant in their students.

Colleges and universities are therefore the driving force which perpetuates a conservative, unicultural, monolingual society. Yet, notice that because of their special position in the total educational system and in the larger structure of society, these institutions can also be the impetus for change. Institutions of higher education possess the potential of giving rise to both a culturally and linguistically pluralistic society.

Culture and Higher Education

In this section I briefly discuss and illustrate, by means of an empirical example, how issues of cultural plurality in education can be

studied using the model outline above. I want to argue that the minority "movement" of the mid-60's offers a case in point and a clear illustration of group conflict theory, as it applies to society at large and to the educational system in particular.

As we have now seen, the dominant group is in a position to define its culture as the only culture relevant for productive participation in society. Given that the educational system serves as a key vehicle for the transmission of culture, and since the dominant group also governs schools, the culture transmitting by the educational system will be that of the dominant community. In the United States the data unequivocally show that participation in the larger society was based on a particular culture's ideologies and that the public schools were "chartered" to perpetuate middle-class, WASP culture.[4] The same cultural ideologies guided both compulsory and higher education, and issues of cultural plurality in schools were seldom researched or discussed.

"Culture" in colleges and universities was not an issue of general concern. It was something that anthropologists (and later, sociologists) dealt with in their specialized language. Furthermore, their studies and discussions were carried out, and limited to foreign nations (e.g., Latin America, Africa, South Asia, the South Seas, or Indian reservations)[5] where "primitive" groups were found. Few studied the culturally pluralistic composition of the United States, and even fewer questioned or challenged the dominance of a particular culture, that is, until recently.

The history of the challenge and the resulting changes in the educational system in recent years can be traced to the minority movement of the mid-60's. Viewed in light of the conflict model, this epoch was a period of contested power struggles in which the ruling status of the dominant group was challenged.

The evidence suggests that the dominant cultural community lost some of its stature, although not much, as we will see below.

Recall that our theory implies that when a shift of power and other resources occurs in the greater society, it will be evidenced in its institutions and organizations. In terms of our example, this means that, if in fact there was a shift in the power structure during the 60's we should be able to document it by studying the major institutions. Specifically, the educational system, because of the key functions it serves, should reflect any meaningful changes in the larger society.

A surface look at cultural plurality in higher education provides a basis for some conclusions on this issue. There have been numerous changes in higher education in recent years in the area of cultural pluralism which can be linked directly to the activities of the 60's.[6] Some of the more visible include:

1. The extension of admission policies to include minorities, women, and low income groups;
2. The founding of "ethnic studies" programs or departments (e.g., Chicano Studies, Black Studies, Asian American Studies, etc.);
3. The revision of curriculum in traditional departments to include courses on minority groups (e.g., Chicanos in American Society, Black History in the U.S., American Indians, Women and Society, etc.);
4. The creation of administrative offices to assist with minority groups (e.g., Assistant to the President for Chicano Affairs, Affirmative Action Officer, Assistant to the Chancellor for Minority Affairs, etc.).

Viewed in terms of our working model, all of these structural changes in the educational system are directly linked to issues of cultural plurality and are the results of power struggles in the larger society.[7] Yet, one should be hesitant to conclude that we now experience educational environments which are genuinely culturally pluralistic. A closer examination reveals that "ethnic studies" programs are not on equal terms with other university programs. This is evidenced by the fact that minority programs are held in suspect. Furthermore, they tend to be viewed and ranked as being of lower quality than traditional departments, they were the last to arrive, and when funds become scarce minority programs are the first to be cut back or completely eliminated. Traditional departments (those supported by the dominant group) tend to possess more of the resources -- power, wealth, prestige, facilities, personnel, etc. In short, minority programs (and minority individuals) in higher education are subject to the same second-class (lower status) citizenship as their respective cultural groups in the larger society. It appears, therefore, that the struggles of the 60's did not produce a major shift in the power structure. As Collins (1974) has noted,

> If in fact educational requirements have become the primary means of cultural control, it is possible to be liberal and "universalistic" without giving away any real advantages [resources] of one's own (Collins, 1974:441).[8]

Conclusions

The power of group conflict analysis comes from the need to recognize that the educational system must be viewed within the context of the larger

structure of society. Within this framework, issues of cultural and linguistic plurality in higher education are directly linked to the cultural diversity and power structure of the greater society.

Finally, as Aguirre and Fernández (1976-77) have noted, careful consideration must be given to the proposition that in order to establish and maintain a culturally pluralistic educational system one must endeavor to establish a culturally pluralistic society. For after all, society creates and provides the ideologies for the educational system and not vice versa. That is, if cultural plurality is limited solely to the educational system, and not with the larger society then what is taught in schools is not what is learned in society. In other words, if the greater society is functioning as unicultural, then it must be assumed that criteria for participation will be unicultural. In the end, success or effectiveness of culturally pluralistic educational programs will depend on the extent to which they replace unicultural criteria for societal participation with multicultural criteria.

Recommendations

A democratic society possesses the potential of diminishing group conflicts by means of implementing national policies which assure equal opportunity to all its citizens regardless of cultural or subcultural group membership. The United States can promote and sustain its cultural and linguistic diversity by extending its democratic principles to the educational system. Truly pluralistic educational environments will guaranty the individual the right to remain indentified with the language and culture of his group as he participates in "mainstream" society. It is in this spirit that the following policy recommendations are proposed.

1. There must be both a general recognition of the cultural and linguistic diversity of this nation and more importantly, an acceptance of this diversity. Groups whose culture is different from "mainstream" or "dominant culture" must not be penalized for their differences in or out of schools.
2. Equal educational opportunity must mean that there will be a conscious and continuous national effort to promote and sustain cultural and linguistic pluralism both in the educational system (from elementary through higher education) and in the greater society. This means that schools must actively foster the cultural diversity found in society.
3. Unicultural criteria for productive participation in schools, colleges, universities, and the larger society must be replaced by multicultural criteria. At the very least this involves a restructuring of measures and standards presently utilized to judge "success."
4. The federal government should make a long term commitment to promote research in the area of cultural and linguistic plurality. There is a lack of documentation and research on the institutional, structural, and social factors which have operated to sustain and promote a unicultural monolingual educational system in our culturally and linguistically diverse society.

FOOTNOTES

1. Although in this discussion I limit the application of group conflict theory to the United States, the model is not nationally bound. For an application of this perspective to the study of education in other nations see Fernández and Llanes (1977).
2. It should also be noted, as the women's movement has brought to surface, that powerful positions in this country have traditionally been held by Males.
3. This is precisely why Illich (1970) argues that "education" today is more accurately termed "schooling." No longer are schools places where the goal is "to develop, in each individual, all the perfection of which he is capable," as Kant envisioned. Instead, they are places where the masses are processed for their roles in society, to benefit the dominant culture.
4. I am calling to mind here Meyer's (1970) analysis in which he outlines how the school, as a socializing organization, is dependent on its "charter -- the agreed on social definition of its products" (p. 565).
5. Indians in the United States are included here not because they were foreigners but because their culture was treated as such.
6. Issues of cultural pluralism in elementary and secondary education are not discussed in this paper although changes are also evident there (e.g., the implementation of bilingual curriculum and instruction programs, the modification of traditional materials, the emphasis on multiculturalism, etc.).

7. Data from a small survey of ten universities in the Southwest showed that, in all ten universities, any of these four changes which they had experienced had been implemented since 1968.
8. In one sense and in light of this it may be argued that cultural programs in higher education serve an initial latent function to the advantage of the dominant group by "cooling-out" subordinate groups and by diverting them from the "real" academic subjects (e.g., law, education, medicine, etc.). Yet it is difficult to believe that this was a planned consequence.

References

Aguirre, A. and C. Fernández. "Mexican Americans and bicultural education: A sociological analysis." Atisbos: Journal of Chicano Research, 1976-77, 2, 15-26.

Becker, H. S. "Schools and systems of stratification." Pp. 93-104 in A. H. Halsey, et al. (eds.) Education, Economy and Society. New York: Free Press, 1961.

Berg, I. Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery. Boston: Beacon, 1971.

Carnoy, M. Education as Cultural Imperialism. New York: David McKay, 1974.

Collins, R. "Functional and conflict theories of educational stratification." American Sociological Review, 1971, 36, 1002-1019.

_____. "Where are educational requirements for employment highest?" Sociology of Education, 197 . 47, 419-442.

_____. Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science. New York: Academic Press, 1975.

Dahrendorf, R. Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959.

Dreeben, R. On What is Learned in School. Reading, Mass.: Addision-Wesley, 1968.

Durkheim, E. Education and Society. New York: Free Press, 1956.

Fernández, C. and J. R. Llanes. "Education, stratification and power: A conflict analysis." Under review, 1977.

Gordon, M. M. Assimilation in American Li . New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Hess, R. D. and J. V. Torney. The Development of Political Attitudes in Children. Chicago: Aldine, 1967.

Hollingshead, A. B. Elmtown's Youth. New York: Wiley, 1949.

Horton, J. "Order and conflict theories of social problems." American Journal of Sociology, 1966, 71, 701-713.

Illich, I. Deschooling Society. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

Mercer, J. R. Labeling the Mentally Retarded: Clinical and Social System Perspectives on Mental Retardation. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.

Meyer, J. W. "The charter: Conditions of diffuse socialization in schools." Pp. 564-578 in W. R. Scott (ed.) Social Processes and Social Structures. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

Mills, C. W. The Power Elite. New York: Oxford University Press, 1956.

Ramírez, M. and A. Castañeda. Cultural Democracy, Bicognitive Development and Education. New York: Academic Press, 1974.

Rist, R. C. "Student social class and teacher expectations: The self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education." Harvard Educational Review, 1970, 40, 411-451.

Turner, R. H. "Sponsored and contest mobility and the school system." American Sociological Review, 1960, 25, 89-107.

U. S. Commission on Civil Rights: Mexican American Education Study. Report III: The Excluded Student. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1972.

Waller, W. The Sociology of Teaching. New York: Russell and Russell, 1932.

Weber, M. Economy and Society. New York: Bedminister Press, 1968.

Figure 1

Schematic representation of the basic assumption of conflict theory: interest groups competing for the scarce resources in society.

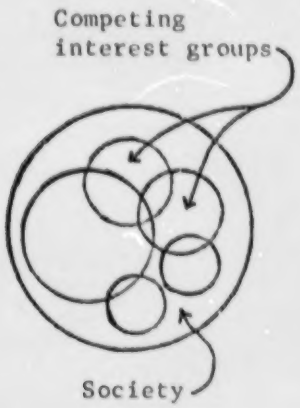

Figure 2

Schematic representation of the restructuring of society when a group gains control in and of the system.